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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0169
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3741
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000166

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STATE FOR EAP; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL BM CH

SUBJECT: PREPARING FOR CHANGE IN BURMA

REF: A. BEIJING 888 (DAS CHRISTENSEN DISCUSS BURMA)
1B. 06 RANGOON 1711 (MEETING WITH CHINESE AMBASSADOR)
1C. 06 RANGOON 1678 (GAMBARI'S NOVEMBER VISIT)

Classified By: CDA Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: China's Ambassador to Burma provided a readout of Gen. Thura Shwe Mann's recent visit to China as well as senior military plans to move forward on its Seven Point Roadmap. He said Burma's number three general was most interested in ideas to get the Burmese economy moving. The Chinese showed him three cities in addition to Beijing during a six-day visit. The Chinese Ambassador also told us that the regime plans to conclude the National Convention after the mid-April Water Festival and move quickly to a referendum, but has not set a date. He credited pressure from the generals' own minds along with international pressure for speeding up the process. He made it clear that he believed China was working in concert with us to promote change in Burma, despite the differences over the UN Security Council resolution. However, that does not mean that China defines an acceptable political transition in Burma the same as we advocate. End Summary.

Thura Shwe Mann's visit to China

12. (C) China's Ambassador Guan Mu joined Charge, the British and French Ambassadors at the Serbian National Day reception February 15. He provided us a readout of Defense Chief of Staff Gen. Thura Shwe Mann's recent visit to China. The regime's number three general spent six days in China, visiting Guizhou, Shenzhen and Shanghai, in addition to Beijing. It was Shwe Mann's first visit to Shenzhen, and, according to Guan, the development there very much impressed him. He said Shwe Mann was most interested in ideas to get the Burmese economy moving forward, and most of his visit focused on economic issues. Other observers have speculated that the Chinese wanted to meet with Shwe Mann anticipating a transition of power from ailing Senior General Than Shwe. The number two general Maung Aye is widely known to be virulently anti-Chinese, and happens to be the Indians' preferred successor.

¶3. (C) The Chinese Ambassador ascribed Shwe Mann's interest in economics as a result of pressure from inside the generals' minds, in addition to external pressures. He corrected his translator that it was not only a reaction to international pressure. He did not, however, describe any particular shifts in policy under contemplation nor whether the military would back away from their current micromanagement of the economy. He did say that the Burmese delegation realized the importance of infrastructure, like electricity, and discussed possible hydropower projects. He did not respond to Charge's question whether they discussed Salween River projects specifically.

Moving Forward on the Roadmap

¶4. (C) The Chinese Ambassador then launched into recent discussions he had with a "very senior official" regarding progress on the regime's Seven Step Roadmap. He left it vague whether this occurred in China or here. He confirmed widespread reports that the National Convention would be reconvened in May to conclude discussion of the drafting principles for a new Constitution. He claimed to have suggested that the regime move it forward to March, but was told that the regime must prepare for the annual mid-April water festival first. He had no information on whether the proposed new Constitution would be unveiled at that time or whether there would be some time before presenting the Constitution. He emphasized that the senior officials wanted to hold the referendum soon, implying within the next year. Other senior officials have told ASEAN and UN officials that the referendum would take place in 2008. Asked how the

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generals might try to avoid an unexpected outcome as occurred with the 1990 parliamentary elections, Guan shook his head like he did not know, but laughed when Charge asked if we could expect a relatively free and fair secret ballot with full debate permitted about the proposed new Constitution.

¶5. (C) The Chinese Ambassador concluded that these discussions showed China to be working in concert with the international community to urge progress on the Roadmap despite its differences with us over the UN Security Council Resolution it vetoed in January. He gestured to us and repeated that China wanted to work cooperatively with us to promote peace and stability. We agreed that North Korea was another good example, and expressed hope that China would also work cooperatively with us on Darfur and Iran. Guan added that the Strategic Economic Dialogue initiated with the U.S. also served as a useful precedent that he hoped would also take place with the European Union to improve coordination.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The Serbian National Day came the day after Guan hosted a large reception for Chinese New Year. That reception most impressed the diplomatic community with the huge number of Chinese businessmen who are here in contrast to the small-to-negligible business presence from any other country. Those are the interests that China must protect in any political transition in Burma, and there is rising popular resentment of the growing Chinese commercial presence here. The Chinese appear to accept that more democracy and freedom, combined with economic growth, would better ensure stability in Burma as opposed to the current harsh repression. This does not mean that they will advocate democracy and freedom as we understand the terms, but rather greater openness with continued controls, a la China.

¶7. (C) A manipulated referendum accompanied by some opening will likely satisfy the Chinese, the Indians, the ASEANs and some Europeans as well. Singapore's Ambassador told another recent gathering that the conclusion of the National

Convention followed by a referendum would put them into Step Three, which ASEAN would regard as major progress. The Malaysian Ambassador chimed in agreement. The fact that a referendum would likely be manipulated does not trouble any of them at all. So we must prepare for these next steps by insisting that the people be given an opportunity to debate the pros and cons; political parties, including NLD, be allowed to hold public discussions about the draft Constitution; and balloting meet international standards with international monitoring.

VILLAROSA